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NOTICES OF
ROGER GERARD VAN POLANEN

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NOTICES

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

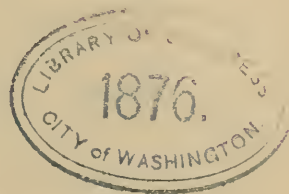
ROGER GERARD VAN POLANEN.

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FROM THE CHRISTIAN REGISTER

OF OCTOBER 12, 1833.

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Charles L. ...

PRINTED DECEMBER,

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ALTHOUGH fourteen years have passed away since the death of Mr. Van Polanen, the interest which attaches to his memory, on the part of all who intimately knew him, seems scarcely to have diminished. It is in this belief that the few notices which follow have been reprinted, — not published, — from the papers in which they originally appeared ; and in order also, that in this more convenient and permanent form, they might be offered to those who cherish his memory with affection, and would perhaps be gratified to possess some memorial, however imperfect, of so good a man and so true a friend.

Wm. Van Polanen
1845

NOTICES.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN REGISTER.

MESSRS. EDITORS : — May I ask you to insert the notices which follow of a late distinguished man and good Christian. Many of your readers, in different parts of the country, have enjoyed his friendship or acquaintance, and to them they may not prove uninteresting. They are very imperfect sketches of one whom, all that knew him, loved and respected, and whose life was full of variety and incident. Few men have seen more of the world than Mr. Van Polanen, and few have gathered more wisdom from a wide and discriminating observation of men and

manners. Although his prejudices were on the side of a high and exclusive aristocracy, yet they were borne down and effectually softened by Christian principle and a heart that loved every thing that bore the name and form of man. His family was among the oldest, if not the oldest, of the nobility of Holland. A tomb in the family burial-place, near Rotterdam, bears the date of A. D. 700. In himself perished, after a lapse of more than eleven centuries, in this remote spot, the last of his name; yet was there nothing in his manners or conversation that betrayed any of that pride of birth which the consciousness of so remote an antiquity is almost always found to generate. He was remarkable for the unostentatious simplicity of his manners, and for an almost republican spirit of adaptation to persons of every character and station. He was a monarchist in his principles,

but not a bigoted one. He saw every thing to admire and commend in the theory of our institutions, and was their sincere well-wisher ; but he doubted if society, even here, was sufficiently enlightened and pure to bear them. It was his belief that no people ever enjoyed richer blessings, and more ample means of happiness, than the people of these States ; but his apprehension was that party spirit, local jealousies, and strife for office would break up the existing harmony, and eventually overthrow a government too weak to withstand the passions and intrigues of selfish and aspiring politicians. Yet so interested did he become in watching the action of the machine, and so beautiful and true did he deem it in principle, that it is believed, if he had returned to Europe in his old age, as he sometimes thought of doing, his heart would have remained in America.

A monarchist here, he would have been a republican there.

He was long an able and faithful servant of his country; and so devoted and ardent was his patriotism, that life would at any time have been a cheap offering for her welfare. It was only after a severe struggle against inclination, that when, a few years ago, at the age of seventy-four, his king again called him to the head of his councils in the East, he was prevailed upon to decline the appointment. It was thought impossible that he could sustain the fatigues and long confinement of the voyage. In the earlier part of his life he resided during ten years at Batavia, as head of the judiciary department, and, virtually, governor of the colony. He obtained the distinguished approbation of his government for the manner in which he performed the duties of his office, and for the very important

changes which he introduced into the administration of the laws in their bearing upon the native population. Upon this subject he published, on his return to Europe, a volume elucidating and defending what he conceived to be the true principles of colonial government, and presenting ample details of his own practice while intrusted with power. It was once more to bring back the colony to the condition to which he had exalted it, and restore the order and principles of his former management, as described in the work referred to, that he was lately summoned, at so advanced a period of his life, to resume the office he had in the strength of his days filled with so much credit to himself and advantage to his country. This was a portion of his life to which he looked back with unmingled satisfaction. Although absolute power throughout the island was confided to

his hands, and there was no appeal from his decisions, he has declared that he could not accuse himself, after the strictest examination, of ever, in a single instance, having acted under the impulse of passion or of private interest, or from any other than motives of a public nature. With opportunities of accumulating wealth to almost any extent, he retired from office, though not poor, yet not rich, with what most would term a bare competency.

As a scholar, his learning was various; in the departments of civil law, politics, and general history, uncommonly exact and extensive. He seemed as familiar with the events, principles, intrigues, policies, of the reigns of the great monarchs of many centuries past, as with those of the principal cabinets of his own time. His recollection of what he had read and studied, in this wide branch of letters,

was not only general, but surprisingly minute and accurate. Of our own history, and of the history, character, and fortunes of our great political parties and their leaders, he had been a careful student, and possessed a knowledge on the subject not surpassed or equalled by many of our native scholars. In theology, especially in the departments of evidences, ecclesiastical history, and the history of opinions, he was particularly well read, and had made valuable communications to some of our religious periodicals.

In social intercourse, he was all that could be desired in a friend and companion. His temper was habitually cheerful. Acting from principle, he was always the same. He was frank and sincere. His own sensibility was nicely delicate, and he treated with scrupulous respect the feelings of others. His humanity was an admirable and beautiful trait. He loved

and protected every thing that had life, and was shocked and pained by nothing more than by cruelty, in any form, towards the meanest of God's creatures. It was his opinion that our national character, and the English also, compared very disadvantageously, in this respect, not only with that of the Dutch, but with that of any other people he had known. His conversation was in a high degree entertaining and instructive ; for he was full of knowledge, and abounded in personal anecdotes and recollections of many of the most celebrated men of the last fifty years, with whom he had become acquainted, or intimate, in the various cities of Europe, or in the capitals of our own country. The easy hospitalities of his own house none can forget who have ever enjoyed them. None can remember them without the most delightful and pleasurable emotions, nor repress a feel-

ing of sorrow that he who was their centre and life has left for ever the scenes which owed so much to his presence.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EDITORIAL ARTICLE FROM THE
NEW YORK EVENING POST.

THE HON. R. G. VAN POLANEN, whose death was mentioned under our obituary head on Saturday, was a gentleman of distinguished worth and ability. He was a native of Holland, and has represented his country with credit and dignity in the four quarters of the world;—in his own country, as filling, at different times, various offices of trust and honor; in Asia, as the head of the judiciary of the Dutch colony of Batavia; in Africa, as the incumbent of a high civil station at the

Cape of Good Hope; and in America, as Minister Resident of the Batavian republic at Washington. This was the last public office which he held. He was ardently attached to the independence and ancient republican institutions of his native country; and when Holland was merged in the empire of France, he refused to accept office under the new order of things, and for the last thirty years resided in this country as a private citizen, in the enjoyment of an easy fortune and literary leisure. At a late period of his life, he received from the present Dutch government the offer of the first law office in the colony at Batavia, which he declined on account of his ill health and advanced age. He was educated at one of the Dutch universities, and was learned in the classic authors, in the civil law, in the literature of his own country, of Italy, Germany, France, and Eng-

land. With English literature, in particular, he had attained a minute acquaintance rare in a foreigner. He was acquainted in early life with Fox, Voltaire, and Gibbon; concerning the latter of whom he used to relate many agreeable reminiscences of conversations held at his weekly public dinners and *soirées*, while residing at Lausanne, where might be met, at one period or other, all the learned and accomplished men of Europe who could afford to travel. In this country, his public duties had not only brought him into official connection, but personal intimacy, with Washington, Hamilton, the elder Adams, Jefferson, and Madison. He was simple in his habits of life, and frugal in his ordinary expenditures, but highly liberal for all worthy objects. The mildness and gentleness of his manners made him beloved by all who had the good fortune of his acquaintance. He

was of the old school of Dutch scholars and statesmen, proud and fond of the ancient glories, manners, and institutions of his country, and an adequate representative of the principles, habits, and studies which produced De Witt, Barneveldt, and Grotius.

EXTRACT FROM A SERMON PREACHED IN THE FIRST CON-
GREGATIONAL CHURCH, IN CHAMBERS STREET, NEW
YORK, ON THE SUNDAY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF
R. G. VAN POLANEN, FROM PROVERBS XVI. 31:—
“THE HOARY HEAD IS A CROWN OF GLORY, IF IT
BE FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

* * * * * I HAVE been led into
these remarks, my friends, as may have
occurred to you, in consequence of the
death of one of our number well known
to most of you, and whom I need not
name. You miss his venerable form from
its accustomed place. You do not see
him joining in these services, as it was
his wont to do. He has left us. In a
good old age, not suddenly, but by a

gradual decline, he has gone to his rest, and we shall behold his face no more.

It is not my custom, you well know, to indulge in celebrating the virtues or rehearsing the actions of those who have been of us, and have departed out from among us. And although it would be so gratifying to myself to do it in the present instance, I shall still refrain. It is a custom which I do not altogether approve, and will not observe. It is so open to abuse, even with the best intentions, that, for one, I dare not trust myself. I will only add, therefore, what, from its close connection with the objects of religious services, may not be inappropriate, that the faith of our departed friend in Christianity and its promises proved to him in his last moments, as it had done for years, the chief source of his happiness. He had laid the foun-

dations of his belief deep in a truly conscientious and profound research. There was scarce any thing he had not read, or rather studied, which promised to throw light upon truth, or impart new force to his convictions. Hence he was an unwavering and intelligent believer in Christianity as a Divine revelation, in Jesus as a sufficient guide and Saviour, and in the rational character of the religion which he taught. His faith, standing secure upon inquiry and thought, did not forsake him at the time when he most needed it, but revealed itself to him in new and unaccustomed power. During the last weeks of his life, he derived the highest satisfaction from dwelling and conversing upon the character of God as Jesus Christ has unfolded it, and often spoke of the confidence with which, when the hour should arrive, he should surrender into the hands of such a being his

spirit. The future and its glories, which “ear hath not heard, nor the eye seen, nor the heart conceived,” engrossed all his thoughts; and it was almost with feelings of disappointment, that, after successive violent assaults of his disease, he found himself yet in the vale of tears. In all his comforts and joys, springing from these and other kindred sources, he acknowledged with warmest expressions of gratitude his obligations to God “in the Gospel of his Son.” It was not upon natural arguments alone, but mainly upon the promises and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that his hope rested, firm as a rock, of a future happy existence. If he had a joy at last, it was inspired by the religion of Jesus; if he had a hope, it grew out of the Gospel; if he sued for mercy, it was through the promises of Christ.

So deep was his need of religion, that,

he has said, he believed he should still have continued to the end a believer in Christianity, though an unhappy one, if he had never heard of that form of it, which, for the last twenty years* of his life, he had embraced and esteemed as his chief possession; but that he could not adequately describe the great accession that had been made to his happiness, after he became fully acquainted with the religion of the New Testament as he last received it. This supplied every want, cleared up every doubt, swept away every cloud.

This form of the religion of Jesus, which approved itself to his reason when

* He frequently acknowledged himself under particular obligations to the writings of Professor Norton and the venerable Noah Worcester. Although he had in early life rejected the doctrines of the Trinity and Atonement as intrinsically incredible, yet "Bible News" was the first book which gave clearness and consistency to his views.

in its full strength, and was the guide of his life, was equally, was even more prized, and was more replete with consolation and joy and strength, and seemed to him more true and beautiful than ever, when he had done living and came to die. He had experienced it to be a good religion to live by; he found it to be a good one to die by. It had proved itself equal to all the emergencies of life, to the formation of character, to action and duty in all their varieties, and he found it equal to all the soul could ask for, or desire, on the bed of sickness, and in the immediate prospect of dissolution. It ever inspired joy; and made him willing, rather to be "absent from the body, that he might be present with the Lord."

I hope I have transgressed no good rule in what I have now said. I have had no thought of glorifying the dead, but simply of benefiting the living, by

speaking of one who loved religion to the end, and whose heart's desire and prayer it was, that all should believe it and love it, from the least to the greatest.

It is our duty to cultivate those affections which bind us to each other as members of the same community, of the same neighbourhood, of the same religious society. It is for this last reason, more especially, that I have taken a brief notice of one who has from the first foundation of this church been one of our number. These walls, which see us sitting together week after week, should see us united. "By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another." We sympathize with each other, on most of the other important occasions of life ; it is good that we do so, when, successively in our order, God sends forth his word and withdraws us from these scenes. The more a religious society can

regard itself as but a larger family, the more nearly will it present a desirable model of what an association of Christian believers ought to be. Let us, then, feel an interest in one another, not only in health but in sickness, not only in joy but in sorrow, not only in life but in death, not only for time but for eternity. So shall we best fulfil the law of love.

* * *

EPITAPH.

UPON A MARBLE MONUMENT, IN THE BURIAL-GROUND
AT BRIDGEPORT, CONN., IS THE FOLLOWING INSCRIPTION.

THIS marble covers the remains of Roger Gerard Van Polanen, born in Rotterdam, Holland, May 3d, 1757; an accomplished scholar, a learned civilian, an honest man, and a sincere Christian. He served his country with fidelity and reputation in various important trusts, in each of the four quarters of the world. At Batavia in the island of Java during many years, in different parts of Europe, and in Africa at the Cape of Good Hope, he was high in the confidence and em-

ployment of his government; and, from the year 1795 to 1802, he filled the appointment of Minister Resident of the Batavian Republic at the court of the United States.

At the advanced age of seventy-four, he was again called by his country to preside over her councils in her East India possessions; but the burden of those years did not allow him to add to it the cares of office. He died in this place, on the 9th of September, 1833, after a residence in this country of thirty-four years.

If he is entitled to an honorable memory for the useful and distinguished course of his public life, they who knew him with the familiarity of friendship will always prefer to remember him for the amiable dispositions, the Christian virtues, and practical wisdom which won the love and respect of all who enjoyed the priv-

ilege of his society. He lived and died in the faith and hope of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This monument is not erected so much to record the honors of the dead, or in the vain hope to rescue from oblivion that which must inevitably be forgotten, as to relieve and gratify the affections of one now solitary and disconsolate, the Widow Bernadina Adelaide Van Polanen.



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